977.5
W75chr
2

ILLINOIS HISTORICAL SURVEY

The British Leave Wisconsin

The War of 1812

James I. Clark

The State Historical Society of Wisconsin

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2012 with funding from
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

http://archive.org/details/chroniclesofwisc02clar

The British Leave Wisconsin

The War of 1812

by

James I. Clark

The State Historical Society of Wisconsin
Madison, 1955

Copyright 1955
by
The State Historical Society of Wisconsin

977.5
W75 hist

THE BRITISH LEAVE WISCONSIN

The War of 1812

by

JAMES I. CLARK

TROUBLE WAS BREWING at the Prairie du Chien trading post. Nicolas Boilvin, American Indian agent, was concerned over the activities of Canadian traders. They were turning Indians against Americans, and only one American trader had been able to go out during the 1810–'11 season.

In February 1811 Boilvin wrote a letter to William Eustis, Secretary of War for President James Madison. He described the little settlement of about 100 people, the surrounding countryside, and then spoke of the fur trade. He sounded a note of warning:[1]

> Great danger, both to individuals and to the Government, is to be apprehended from the Canadian traders; they endeavor to incite the Indians against us; partly to monopolize their trade and partly to secure friendship in case a war should break out between us and England. They are constantly making large presents to the Indians, which the latter consider as a sign of approaching war, and under this impression frequently apply to me for advice on the subject. Hitherto I have been able to keep them friendly.

Boilvin had reason to be alarmed. Although war between England and the United States was more than a year away, war between Americans in the Northwest and the Indians was quite close.

Background of the Trouble

In 1796 the British had moved out of the forts they held on American soil. They agreed to work under American fur trade laws. Difficulties soon arose, however. The American government set up a trade monopoly and established "factories" to which the Indians would bring furs and be paid for them. The idea was to control the Indians by controlling their supply of goods. The British and Canadian traders had always given the Indians goods on credit and the following season furs would be brought in as payment. The Americans paid for the furs when they were received. No furs, no payment. The Indians didn't like that.

Another Indian sore-spot was the lack of quality in the American supplies. The English insisted on high quality articles for the Indians—nothing was too good for them. Usually the Indians could also count on

Diorama of the interior of the fur "factory" at Prairie du Chien. (Scale model in the Prairie du Chien Museum).

a steady supply of liquor from the British. With the Americans, too often most anything was good enough for the Indians, and there was to be no liquor.

The traders working for England had a different attitude toward the Indians than did the Americans. Canadians, especially those with a French background, knew at least one Indian language. They lived with the redmen, ate and smoked with them, and often married their women. The government-paid American agent didn't work that way. He figured on being among the Indians only a short time and saw no reason for becoming one of them. He stayed in his settlement and kept his American ways. The Indians took note of the difference.

The American licensing system didn't suit British traders. The laws and their enforcement were too strict. The traders didn't have the freedom they had been used to. The American non-intercourse laws enforced under Presidents Jefferson and Madison also hurt English traders. Getting goods through American forts became difficult and uncertain. The traders resorted to smuggling. In the summer of 1810 about $10,000 worth of supplies were sneaked past the American fort on Mackinac Island at the entrance to Lake Michigan, but that didn't happen very often. When Indians complained about a shortage of goods, the British blamed the Americans.

Finally Americans became aware of their waning influence with the Indians and tried to change things. Presents to the Indians were increased, and chiefs were urged to go to Washington and visit the President and receive more gifts. But by then it was too late.

At the root of the problem was the question of how the frontier land should be used. The British wanted to keep it as Indian territory, for the fur trade was profitable. Americans looked on the trade only as a stage in opening the country to settlement. The movement of American settlers into the Ohio valley after the Revolutionary War alarmed both British

and Indians. To the English it meant the loss of furs; to the Indians it meant the loss of hunting grounds. The two became natural allies against the Americans.

The American settler had little understanding of, or sympathy for, Indian land ownership. He merely wanted to move the Indian out so the land could be farmed. He considered the Indian unequal to the white man and often had two standards of justice, one white and one red. Too often illegal means and liquor were used to separate the Indian from his land. The redman saw his life valued lightly on the frontier and bitterly resented the intruding settler. The frontiersman had no illusions about Indians. He knew they were out to get him whenever possible and viewed them as deadly obstacles in the path of settlement. He suspected that the British encouraged Indians to raid and pillage the frontier to discourage further American expansion.

In 1809 Governor William Henry Harrison of Indiana Territory got an Indian treaty giving the United States three million acres of land along the Wabash river. For two Shawnee brothers, Tecumseh and the Prophet, that was the last straw. They saw the hunting grounds disappearing, and concluded that Americans had to be driven south of the Ohio river before the Indians would be safe.

The showdown came at the Battle of Tippecanoe in November 1811. The battle was called an American victory, but it cost many American lives, then and later. Tecumseh's confederation of Indian tribes was ended. He went off to join the British and took many Indians with him.[2]

Caramaunee, a chief of the Winnebago.

The Winnebago Chief Caramaunee had led a large party of his Wisconsin Indians to Tippecanoe and about forty of the band stayed there, dead. The rest returned vowing vengeance on everything American. Setting up a war camp on the Rock river, they carefully searched every passing boat for Americans, killing or capturing all they found. Other tribes that had not been east caught the spirit and hit the warpath. The Potawatomi took care of the Illinois country, killing and scalping isolated settlers. The Sauk and Winnebago raided along the Mississippi. Tecumseh ranged over the Northwest and along the great river, drumming up tribes to fight Americans. Tradition has it that he conferred with Tomah, the great Menominee chief, near Green Bay in 1812. American frontier settlements farther east were also raided by Indians.[3]

In the United States Congress during the winter of 1811–'12 there was

much talk about impressment, freedom of the seas, and the conquest of Canada and the Floridas. War with England was approaching. That was all right with the frontiersman. He didn't know much about freedom of the seas, but he did know a lot about Indians. He was eager to stop the border raids and get the redmen out of the way. If he had to fight the British to get peaceful Indians, he was ready to do it.

The War of 1812 Begins

The British were fortunate to have an Indian agent working the Wisconsin region who was far superior to anyone the Americans had in the field. Six feet tall, two hundred pound Robert Dickson had more influence over Wisconsin Indians than any other white man at that time. Born in Scotland, he had been in the fur trade since 1781, traveling the Great Lakes and the Fox-Wisconsin many times. The Indians practically worshipped Dickson, called him "Mascotapah [mäs-co′-tä-pä], or "The Red-Haired Man." A daughter of the Sioux chief Red Bird became his wife. As long as it was possible, Dickson held the allegiances of Wisconsin Indians to the British, often suffering much hardship in the process. Although he urged Indians to war on Americans, he tried to keep them from killing and scalping when they could take prisoners instead.

Returning to Mackinac from a trip to Prairie du Chien in June 1812, Dickson was met at Portage by messengers from Isaac Brock, Lieutenant-Governor of Upper Canada. War between the United States and England was due that summer. Brock wanted information on the Indians who could be relied on to aid the British. Dickson replied immediately, and sent some thirty tribesmen to Amherstburg, near Detroit. He took the remaining Winnebago, Menominee and Sioux he could gather to St. Joseph Island, near Sault Ste. Marie, where he arrive on July 1. War had been declared on June 18.

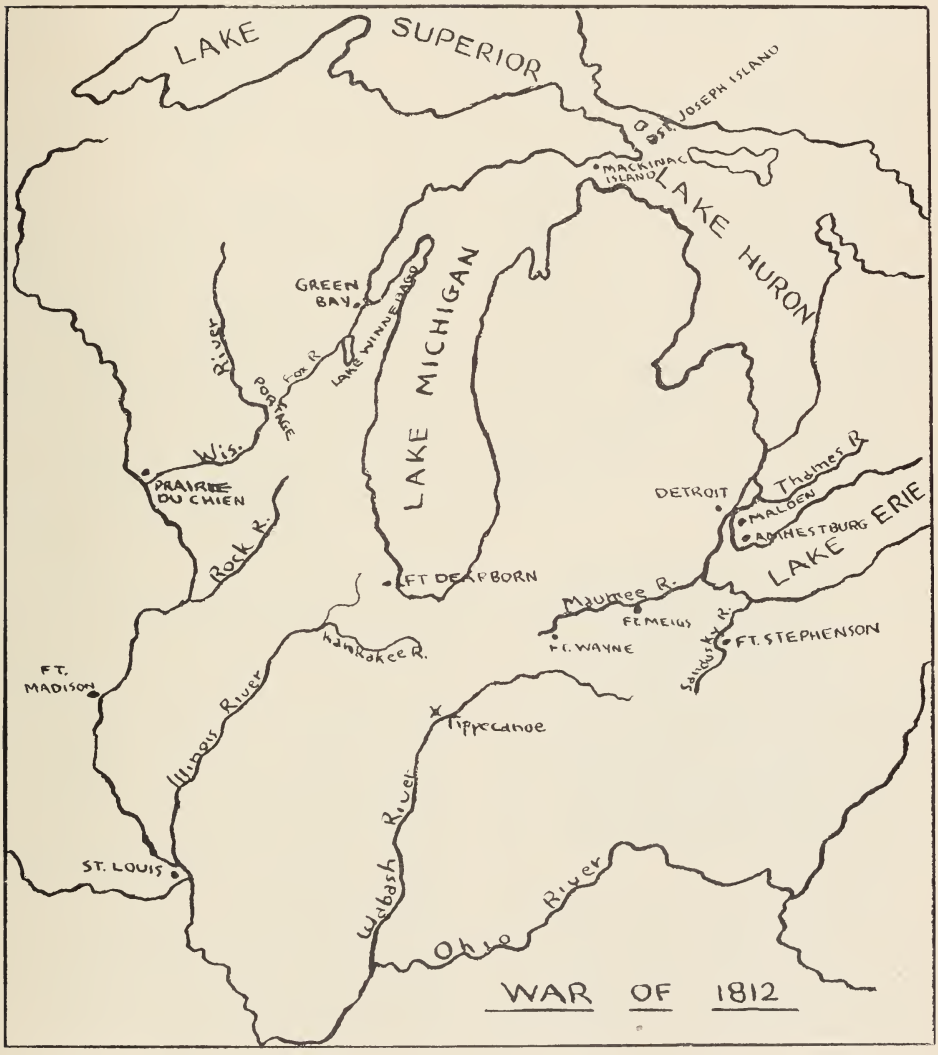
Dickson sent word to other tribes, and soon many Indians flocked to the island. There were Winnebago under Chief Wild Cat from Garlic Island (now called Island Park) in Lake Winnebago. Other members of that tribe gathered under Black Wolf and the Teal. There were Menominee under Tomah, with young Oshkosh, and Souligny [sōō-lïg-nū′], Grizzly Bear and Iometah [ī-o′-më-

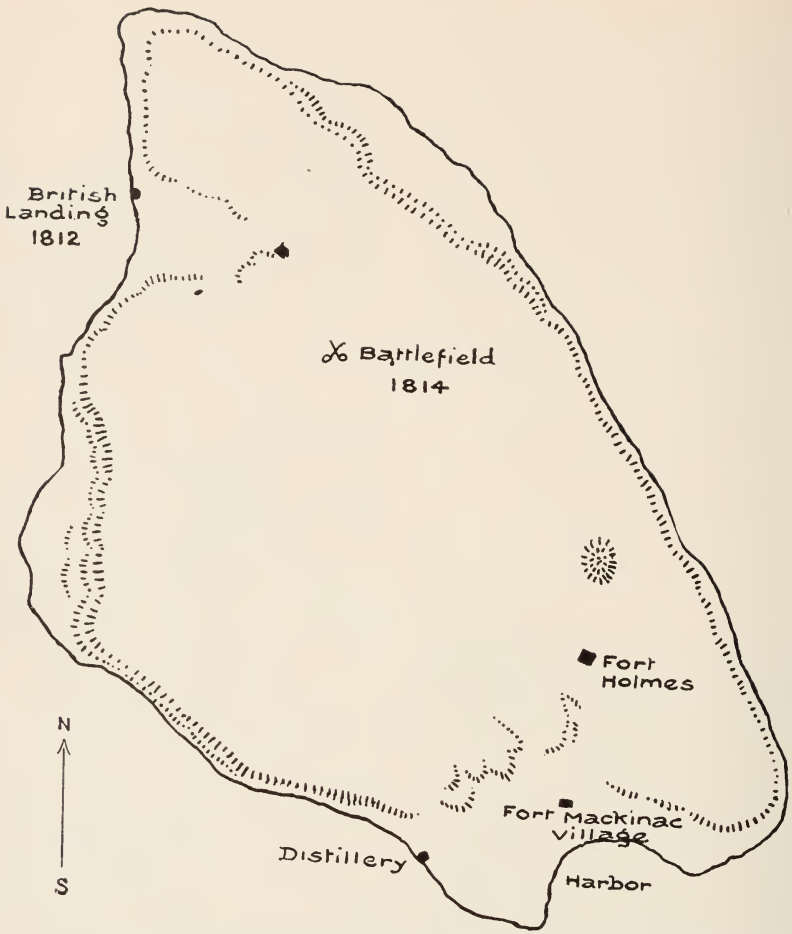
Winnebago Indian.

tä]. Sioux from the banks of the upper Mississippi arrived. Efforts were made to get Ottawa and Chippewa living around Lake Michigan to join the party, but they wanted to see how the war would go before joining.

Arms were distributed, bullets made, and provisions gathered in preparation for an assault on the American fort on Mackinac Island. In the middle of July a force of six or seven hundred Indians and British soldiers left St. Joseph. The schooner *Caledonia* led the way.

The Mackinac fort was in poor shape. Pickets were rotted, earthworks had crumbled, and only fifty-seven men garrisoned the place. Lieutenant Porter Hanks, the commander, didn't know that war had





Mackinac Island. 1814 Battlefield refers to the unsuccessful American attempt to recapture the island.

been declared. He learned of the preparations being made on St. Joseph, but was not sure what they meant. Hanks decided to send Michael Dousman, a trader well-known by the British, to find out what was going on.

Dousman and a crew of paddlers pushed off at night. They were about fifteen miles on the way when they found themselves in the midst of the invading flotilla. The would-be spy cheerfully admitted that the fort was weak and unprepared, and suggested that he return to warn the villagers on Mackinac Island, so they would be out of the way. The leaders of the expedition let him go, trusting that he would keep the coming invasion a secret.

By the dim early morning light of July 17, there was much scurrying about in the village of Mackinac. Bags were packed, wagons loaded.

John H. Kinzie, long-time Wisconsin fur trader. His Indian Agency House at Fort Winnebago is now a museum, located near Portage.

and the townspeople moved out while the garrison slept. Lieutenant Hanks was astonished to wake up and discover the village empty, the fort surrounded by howling, painted Indians, and a British cannon staring at him from a hill above the fort. He had little choice. The Indians were well-controlled; there was no scalping and no lives were lost as the Americans marched out without firing a single shot.

The fall of Mackinac was a bad blow to Americans. About $10,000 in furs and over $6,000 in cash fell into British hands. Control of Lake Michigan and upper Wisconsin was gone. The position of General William Hull at Detroit was made worse. Indians all over the Northwest now raised the warwhoop and joined the British. The way was cleared for massacre at Fort Dearborn.[4]

At that fort Captain Nathan Heald received orders from General Hull early in August. He was to abandon the fort and distribute the provisions there to friendly Indians, and move to Fort Wayne. Arms and ammunition not needed on the march were to be destroyed.

Friendly Indians were scarce. Potawatomi in and around the fort had heard about Mackinac. They could hardly wait to get at the Dearborn garrison. The trader John Kinzie objected to leaving a fort fairly well provisioned and armed to take off across hostile Indian country. But Captain Heald had been ordered to leave, and preparations for evacuation began.

It took six days to get ready, and that gave the Potawatomi from around Milwaukee and from the Kankakee river time to gather. On August 15 the troops, accompanied by many women and children, marched out of the fort, guided by a few Miami Indians.

The Potawatomi had a field day. About five hundred of them hit the retreating party soon after it left the fort. The Miami fled. The outnumbered soldiers put up strong resistance but the first Indian volley left

Mrs. John H. Kinzie, pioneer Wisconsin woman. Author of *Wau-bun — Early Day in the Northwest,* a story of experiences on the frontier.

many of them face down on the sand. Many of the women fought as hard as the men, but it was of little use. A wagon containing a dozen children was overtaken and all those inside tomahawked and scalped. The Kinzie family was saved by friendly Indians, but others were not so fortunate. Before it ended, forty-two soldiers and civilians had been killed and many others were carried off to Indian captivity. Dearborn was burned.[5]

General Hull and over 2,000 Americans gave up Detroit to a combined British-Indian force the next day. A great part of the Northwest was now in enemy hands.

Indians Control Wisconsin

Wisconsin was rapidly cleared of Americans. Boilvin and others fled Prairie du Chien, going down the river to St. Louis. British traders joined the Sauk and Fox bands on the Mississippi and urged them to war on Americans. The Winnebago continued to plunder and burn American property around Prairie.

In September a party of about two hundred Winnebago surrounded Fort Madison, on the Mississippi. For three days they continued the seige, killing anyone venturing out of the fort and trying to fire the stockade. They were unable to get a fire going, and finally grew tired of the contest. Fort Madison was safe for a time.

Robert Dickson visited Chicago and Milwaukee, recruited Indians and urged traders to bring more redmen to the British side. In the spring of 1813 he went to Prairie du Chien. A large party of Indians had gathered, anxious to get on with the war. Dickson took one band to Green Bay and sent another group to Detroit.[6]

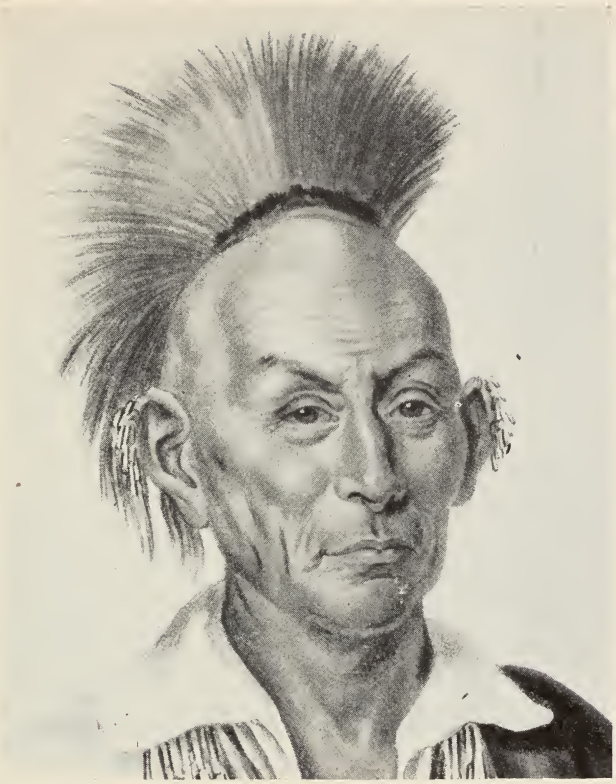
About this time the Sauk under Black Hawk decided to join the British. Around five hundred of them journeyed to Green Bay. There they camped with a large number of Kickapoo, Ottawa and Winnebago, and received provisions, tobacco, pipes, guns, ammunition and a variety of clothing. The Sauk chief had an interview with Dickson. Black Hawk told about it years later:

> He received me with a hearty shake of the hand; presented me to the other chiefs who treated me cordially, expressing themselves as being much pleased to meet me. After I was seated Colonel Dixon said: "General Black Hawk, I sent for you to explain to you what we are going to do and give you the reasons for our coming here. . . . You will now have to hold us fast by the hand. Your English father had found out that the Americans want to take your country from you and has sent me and my braves to drive them back to their own country. He has, likewise, sent a large quantity of arms and ammunition, and we want all your warriors to join us."

Then Dickson placed a medal around Black Hawk's neck and handed him a silk flag. He told the chief that he was to command all the braves that were to leave there in a couple of days for Detroit.[7]

The British and Indians Meet Misfortune

At Detroit the British decided to feint at the American Fort Meigs on the Maumee river, and then hit Fort Stephenson on the lower Sandusky, forty miles from Lake Erie. The



Black Hawk, a chief of the Sauk.

sortie against Meigs was unsuccessful. As Black Hawk said, "The Americans fought well, and drove us back with considerable loss. I was greatly surprised at this, as I had been told that the Americans would not fight.[8]

Things were worse at Fort Stephenson. There the young Major George Croghan of Kentucky with a handful of militia held off six hundred regulars and about eight hundred Wisconsin Indians. The Indians were even more surprised, and dismayed. "The British advanced and commenced the attack, fighting like true braves, but were defeated by the braves in the fort, and a great number of our men were killed," mourned Black Hawk. "The British army was making preparations to retreat. I was now tired of being with them, our success being bad, and having took no plunder. . . . That night I took about twenty of my braves, and left the British camp for home."[9] Many of the other chiefs followed. The Indians had no stomach for a long battle, and even less for the lack of opportunity to take home plunder.

The British received another setback on the Mississippi. Early in 1813 American agents convinced the chiefs of about 1,500 Sauk, Fox and

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
LIBRARY

Iowa that they should migrate to the north bank of the Missouri river and forget the war. The presence of a large body of American militia on the Illinois river helped the Indians see the wisdom of that idea, and they moved westward.

That took some pressure off Illinois settlements, but it didn't save Fort Madison. In July a band of Sauk, Fox and Winnebago moved on the fort. Two soldiers were killed outside the stockade and a little later four more were cut off in an outlying blockhouse. The garrison held out until November. Faced with starvation the soldiers pulled out. They successfully eluded the Indians and fired the fort as they withdrew.[10]

Americans had some success in other war theatres. In the fall of 1813 Detroit was regained. The British were beaten at the Battle of the Thames, north of Lake Erie, and Captain Oliver H. Perry won the Battle of Put-in-Bay, on the western end of Lake Erie, in September 1813. In 1812 the English had burned a portion of the city of Washington but an invading fleet had been beaten off at Fort McHenry and "The Star Spangled Banner" was written. At sea American sailors were giving a good account of themselves, although the British blockade of American ports was tightening.

An American attempt to recapture Mackinac Island under the hero of Fort Stephenson, Major George Croghan, was unsuccessful. The attack was staged in the summer of 1814, and was easily beaten off. The island remained in British hands until the war ended.

British Fortunes Continue Downhill

After the defeat of Fort Stephenson Robert Dickson had practically to start over in recruiting Indians to fight Americans. He and some traders spent the winter of 1813–'14 on Garlic Island in Lake Winnebago. There they met with Indians and tried to win them back to the British. It proved to be a hard winter. Crops had not been good, game was scarce. Dickson addressed many letters to friends at Green Bay, begging for provisions to distribute to the Indians. The number of empty Indian stomachs around Lake Winnebago increased daily. The recruiting business was not so good.

Things were no better at Prairie du Chien. Food was short. Adding to that trouble came a letter from Nicolas Boilvin, urging residents to claim United States protection before it was too late. That convinced Prairie residents an American attack was coming. The Indians were no help. They drove off cattle, harrassed the settlers and generally made things miserable for everyone.[11]

Americans at St. Louis hadn't slept the winter through. On the first of May five barges loaded with sixty-one regulars and over one hundred militia embarked for Prairie du Chien, under the command of Governor William Clark. The expedition arrived at its destination a month later, after brushing off an attack by some Sauk near the mouth of the Rock river. There was no resistance at Prairie.

The Americans set to work strengthening the settlement's defenses. In a little over two weeks the

Reproduction of a water color of Fort McKay (the American Fort Shelby). Possibly drawn by Capt. A. H. Bulgar, last British commander there, in 1814.

troops moved into newly-built Fort Shelby and on the last of the month the small gunboat put off downstream with the volunteers, whose sixty day enlistment term was up. The *Governor Clark,* a large and well-armed gunboat, remained opposite the fort. The Americans settled down to a short occupation.[12]

The British Strike Back

News of the invasion reached the British commander at Mackinac, Colonel Robert McDouall, on June 21. Under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel William McKay seventy-five whites and over a hundred Indians sailed to counter-attack. They landed at Green Bay early in July. There a militia company and another hundred Indians joined up. The expedition moved up the Fox to Portage, picking up small bands of Indians along the way. Altogether a force of over six hundred Indians and whites was quietly descending the Wisconsin, aiming at the unsuspecting Americans at Fort Shelby.

The invaders halted on the night of July 16 about six miles from Prairie. Spies were sent to scout the settlement. They returned with the information that there were only about sixty soldiers in the fort.

The next day was Sunday, and the American officers prepared to take a ride into the country. Nicolas Boilvin, who had returned with the conquerors, sent a man named Sandy out for some cattle that morning, as he wanted to lay in some fresh meat. Sandy returned and informed Boilvin that there were a lot of red cattle out there and invited him to look. Boilvin could scarcely believe it. There in full battle dress of red coats, with battle flags flying, were some British regulars. He ran to spread the alarm. Most of the villagers fled for the country.

A little after noon McKay sent the following message to Captain Joseph Perkins, fort commander:

> Sir,—An hour after the receipt of this, surrender to His Majesty's forces under my command, unconditionally, otherwise I order you to defend yourself to the last man. The humanity of a British officer obliges me (in case you should be obstinate) to request you will send out of the way your women and children.
>
> I am Sir,
> Your very humble servant,
> W. McKay
> Lt. Col. Commanding the Expedition

Perkins, not one to give up so easily, replied:

> Sir,—I received your polite note and prefer the latter, and am determined to defend to the last man.
>
> Yours, &c,
> Jos. Perkins
> Capt., Commanding United States Troops

That settled, the British turned to the *Governor Clark*. A three pound cannon opened on the boat. A few well-placed shots opened a number of leaks as the boat moved from midstream to the western shore. A party of thirty or forty Menominee crossed the river and poured rifle fire into the gunboat. Soon it was scurrying downstream, much to the surprise and dismay of those in the fort, who yelled after it and even fired on it themselves. The attackers then attended to the fort.

Most of the invading force took up positions well outside the range of rifles and small arms and poured a lazy fire on the stockade. The fort's cannon replied occasionally. No one seemed very eager to get at the battle, although the Americans were outnumbered something like ten to one. The Winnebago Indians had come along for fun only, and had no intention of getting killed, or even wounded. In his report of the engagement McKay complained, "Many of them (Winnebago) in place of meeting the enemy immediately on their arrival ran off to the farms, killed the inhabitants' cattle and pillaged their houses even to the covering off their beds, and leaving many without a second shirt to put on their backs. Even in the village they did the same outrages, breaking to pieces what they could not carry away."

Next day the soldiers and Indians continued to amuse themselves with long-distance shooting and McKay called a council of war. It was decided to make an assault, but the Winnebago chief, the Teal, disagreed. He favored digging a tunnel from the river to the fort and blowing up the garrison. McKay told him to get at it. After digging about twelve to fifteen of the several hundred between

the river and the fort the Indians gave up. It was McKay's move again.

On the 19th determination ruled. The troops were put to work making bullets and cannon balls and the balls were heated. Two lines of breastworks were erected, one at 1700 yards and the other at 450 yards from the fort. About six o'clock in the afternoon preparations were complete.

In the fort things were not so good. Five men had somehow been wounded by the periodic fire from the invaders and there were no hospital stores. The well had caved in. The Indian yelps on the outside seemed louder and more bloodcurdling. Just as the signal to fire the heated cannon balls was given, Perkins sent up the white flag. He had had enough.

Letters were again exchanged. This time Perkins was not so short. He surrendered the fort and asked for protection from the Indians, which the British readily promised.

The Indians were most unhappy. They had come a long way for scalps and hated to leave without them, even if they hadn't lent much help. A Winnebago went up to the stockade and seeing a soldier near the wall called out, "How do!" and stuck his hand through a port hole. The soldier foolishly took the hand and got his own pulled through the hole and a finger cut off. As the Americans marched out a Sioux warrior tried to strike one of them, and was promptly knocked down with a war club swung by a chief.

Denied the prisoners, many Winnebago and some Sioux turned to the countryside and improved their marksmanship on horses and cattle belonging to settlers. They thoroughly plundered the fort and gen-

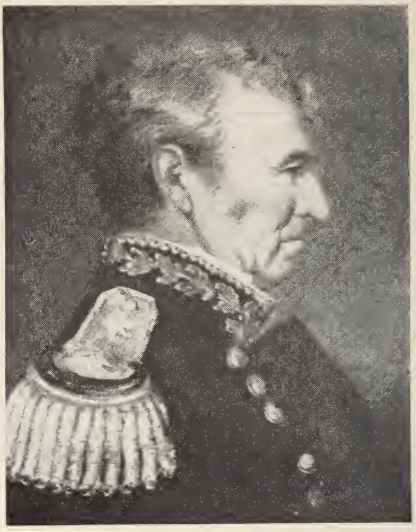
Diorama of the surrender of Fort Shelby to the British.
(Scale model in Prairie du Chien Museum).

erally made nuisances of themselves. McKay threatened to turn troops on them if they didn't quit and go home. Finally, after cutting down a field of green wheat, they left.

The Winnebago made McKay very bitter. In his report he said that they "behaved in a most villainous manner and were I permitted to decide their fate should never receive a shilling's worth of presents from Government, on the contrary I would cut them off to a man." McKay had reason to be unhappy, but the Winnebago merely proved again what every frontier soldier knew very well—Indians were fickle, unreliable allies, and often had their own war aims which might be somewhat different from those of the side which they were supporting at the time.

The next day three American keelboats were reported on the way upstream. Unaware of the British attack, some regulars and militia were coming to relieve the Prairie garrison. Near the Rock river one of the boats ran aground. The group was attacked by a party of Sauk under Black Hawk, who was still willing to help the British whenever he could. Some of the boats were set afire. The Americans were able to hold the Indians off and the next morning the boats retreated downstream. Eight men had been killed and several of the party wounded.

So ended the brief occupation of Wisconsin soil by Americans. Fort Shelby became Fort McKay. Lieutenant Perkins and his command were given a boat and allowed to go to St. Louis. McKay soon returned to Mackinac and left the fort under another commander. Later Captain A. H. Bulgar took over.



Zachary Taylor, Indian fighter, Mexican War general, President of the United States.

An American force under Major Zachary Taylor tried to retake the fort in September. The expedition was attacked near the mouth of the Rock river, a favorite spot for attack due to the low water over the rapids there. A few whites and about eight hundred Indians raked the Americans with rifle and cannon fire. It was too much for the invaders. They soon abandoned the fight and retreated.[13]

End of the British in Wisconsin

Although the English now controlled the upper Mississippi, the situation around Prairie du Chien was far from encouraging. Indians kept coming to the settlement for provisions that were scarce enough for the whites. Hunting and fishing were poor and the Indians hung around the fort, creating a nuisance and a danger. The arrival of two Canadians

from St. Louis brought word of American preparations for another attack. The village fell gloomily to molding bullets and worrying about supplies. Provisions on hand would have been enough for only about half the Indians who would be expected to aid in the defense. The attack never came, but the threat was hard on the nerves. Morale among the troops was low. On New Year's Eve, 1814, there was a small mutiny among the volunteer militia, and a couple of soldiers were court martialed and flogged. No one at the settlement knew that the war had already ended earlier that month.

With Robert Dickson the winter of 1814–'15 was much like the previous one. Crops and game were short all over the region. He spent much time traveling between Mackinac and Prairie du Chien, gathering goods and supplies for Indians. As the Americans now controlled Lake Erie, materials from the east had to bypass north of there, and that resulted in long delays.

Dickson's concern over supplying Indians got him into trouble with the Prairie commander, Captain Bulgar. Indians got provisions from Dickson whenever they asked. He saw no other way to keep them loyal to the English. Captain Bulgar felt that too many supplies were going to the redmen, especially when the fort and settlement were so short. He complained to McDouall about it. Dickson was finally ordered to Mackinac in April 1815. There he was rather unjustly dismissed from the service. His work was finished anyway. There was no longer any need to hold the Indians to a war that was now over. Later Dickson carried his case to London and his great services to the Crown were finally recognized. He was given the permanent rank of Lieutenant-Colonel and retired with a life-long pension.[14]

Spring brought rumors of peace to the British outpost on the Mississippi. The news caused Indian trouble. The warriors were not ready to quit. Black Hawk became one of their spokesmen. He pointed out to Captain Bulgar why the Indians resented what appeared to be the British desertion of their cause. Black Hawk waved a war belt of wampum and said:[15]

> My Father!—You see this Belt. When my Great Father at Quebec gave it to me, he told me to be friends with all his red children, to form but one body, to preserve our lands, and to make war against the Big Knives who want to destroy us all. My Great Father said "Take courage, my children, hold tight your war club, and destroy the Big Knives, as much as you can. If the Master of Life favors us, you shall again find your lands as they formerly were. Your lands shall again be green, and the sky blue. When your lands change color you shall also change." This, my Father, is the reason why we Saulks hold this war club tight in our hands, and will not let it go.
>
> My Father!—I now see the time drawing nigh when we shall all change color; but my Father, our lands have not yet changed color. They are red—the water is red with our blood, and the sky is clouded. I have fought the Big Knives, and will continue to fight them till they are off of our lands. Till then my Father, your Red Children cannot be happy.

Black Hawk then laid his tomahawk on the ground before him.

> My Father!—I show you this war club to convince you that we Saulk have not forgotten the words of our Great Father at Quebec. You see, my Father, that the club you gave me is still red, and that we continue to hold it fast.

There was nothing much Bulgar could say that would satisfy Black Hawk. In his report he wrote, "I shall reply to their message to-morrow, and shall now only tell them that the war club was put in their hands by the King their Great Father for the best of purposes for their own good, and the general good of the Indians, and when he thinks it necessary for them to bury it down, he will tell them."

Black Hawk, like other Indians, was unable to stem the advance of the American frontier, with or without British help. He was to fight again, but he couldn't drive the Big Knives off his land.

Then came a letter announcing the peace treaty that had been signed at Ghent, in Belgium the previous December. Bulgar was ordered to "immediately adopt every precaution to instill pacific sentiments in the minds of the Indians, to place that part of the Treaty which regards themselves, in the most favorable point of view, and above all, to guard any future act of hostility on their part against the Americans." Bulgar didn't need to be told. To complicate matters, about 1,200 more Indians arrived ready for war.

The troublesome part of the peace treaty was that no provision had been made for fulfilling British promises to restore hunting grounds Americans had taken. The British position was embarrassing. The Indians refused to obey the treaty.

Bulgar called for a council. Plans were carefully laid to combat trouble. The garrison was readied, the troops posted. About noon on May 22 the commander left for the council house, not knowing whether he would return alive.

In the house the chiefs sat waiting. Many of them had fought Americans longer than the British had. They had taken many scalps. They had seen their villages burned, their braves killed. They had seen many thousands of acres of choice hunting land taken over by the Big Knives. Now they were to lose any chance of ever regaining what they had lost.

The British brought out the great belt of wampum used in 1812 to summon the tribes to war. Then it had been red, the color of war; now it was blue, the color of peace. An interpreter arose and spoke, explaining the treaty and advising the Indians to accept it. The British had to leave, the Americans were too powerful. He sat down.

The Indians were silent. In the fort the soldiers strained every nerve waiting for a signal of the outcome, not knowing whether they would have to fight Indians before they could pull out of their wilderness outpost and go home.

Then, one by one, the chiefs arose and pledged support of the treaty. The crisis passed. Immediately a flag whipped up over the council house and the fort's guns roared a twenty-one gun salute. The peace pipe was lighted, and solemnly passed from man to man, each taking a puff and

Fort Crawford, built at Prairie du Chien by the Americans in 1816.

handing it on. Five hours had passed when the conference broke up. Another salute from the fort's cannons greeted the Indians as they filed out of the council house. A little later, messengers left to proclaim peace to the Indian villages of the area.

The next day Bulgar addressed a letter to Governor William Clark at St. Louis. "I propose evacuating this Post to-morrow taking with me the gun &c., captured in this Fort, in order that they may be delivered up at Mackinac," he wrote. The British were withdrawing immediately because "I have not the smallest hesitation in declaring my decided opinion that the presence of a detachment of British & United States Troops, at the same time, at Fort McKay would be the means of embroiling either party or the other, in a fresh rupture with the Indians. . . ." Bulgar then reported to Lieutenant-Colonel McDouall: "I withdrew from Fort McKay on the 24th May. . . . The Fort has been destroyed."[16]

Thus ended fifty-two years of British control in Wisconsin. The fur trade passed securely into American hands, and was soon to be ended in that area, the fabulous resources of beaver finally exhausted. No permanent English influence remained. Only memories were left with a handful of soldiers and traders, and in the hearts of many Indians.

NOTES

[1] "Letter From Nicholas Boilvin, Indian Agent, to William Eustis, Secretary of War," State Historical Society of Wisconsin, *Collections,* 11:247–53.

[2] Francis E. Bierne, *The War of 1812* (New York, 1949), 58–60; Louise P. Kellogg, *The British Regime in Wisconsin and the Northwest* (Madison, 1935), 233–82; Louis Tohill, "Robert Dickson, Fur Trader," *North Dakota Historical Quarterly,* 3:5–49, 83–128, 182–204 (October, 1928, January, April, 1929), 23–49; Louise P. Kellogg, "The Capture of Mackinac in 1812," State Historical Society of Wisconsin *Proceedings 1912*:129–31.

[3] Kellogg, *British Regime,* 274.

[4] Tohill, "Robert Dickson," 5–13, 84–92; Kellogg, "Capture of Mackinac," 132–45.

[5] Kellogg, *British Regime,* 285–88; Juliette M. Kinzie, *Wau-bun—Early Day in the Northwest* (Menasha, 1948), 130–94.

[6] Kellogg, *British Regime,* 289–97; Tohill, "Robert Dickson," 94–103; "Law and Grignon Papers," State Historical Society of Wisconsin, *Collections,* 10:96–97.

[7] *The Autobiography of Black Hawk.* (Oquawka, Ill., 1882), 33–34.

[8] *Ibid.,* 36.

[9] *Ibid.*

[10] Kellogg, *British Regime,* 307–08.

[11] Tohill, "Robert Dickson," 104–13; "Law and Grignon Papers," 98–117; Alfred E. Bulgar, "Events at Prairie du Chien Previous to American Occupation in 1814," State Historical Society of Wisconsin, *Collections,* 13:4–5.

[12] Kellogg, *British Regime,* 313–16; Black Hawk, *Life,* 56–57; Bulgar, "Events at Prairie du Chien," 5–9.

[13] Douglas Brymner, "Capture of Fort M'Kay, Prairie du Chien, in 1814," State Historical Society of Wisconsin, *Collections,* 11:254–70; Augustin Grignon, "Seventy-two Years' Recollections of Wisconsin," *Ibid.,* 3:271–72; Kellogg, *British Regime,* 313–21.

[14] Tohill, "Robert Dickson," 113–22; "Bulgar Papers," State Historical Society of Wisconsin, *Collections,* 13:59–130; Alfred E. Bulgar, "Last Days of the British at Prairie du Chien," *Ibid.,* 154–55.

[15] "Bulgar Papers," 131–32.

[16] *Ibid.,* 148–51; Bulgar, "Last Days," 156–62.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Louise P. Kellogg, *The British Regime in Wisconsin and the Northwest* (Madison, 1935), is the most complete treatment of the entire period of the English in Wisconsin. Miss Kellogg's "The Capture of Mackinac in 1812," Wisconsin State Historical Society *Proceedings, 1912*:124–45, relates that event in some detail.

Material on Robert Dickson can be found in Louis Tohill, *Robert Dickson: British Fur Trader on the Upper Mississippi* (Ann Arbor, 1927).

One story on the Fort Dearborn massacre can be found in Juliette M. Kinzie, *Waubun—Early Day in the Northwest* (Menasha, 1948), 233–87.

Black Hawk, *The Life of Black Hawk* (Iowa City, 1932), is an interesting autobiography, written in later years by the Sauk chief and covering his activity in the War of 1812 as well as the Black Hawk War itself. Cyrenus Cole, *I Am a Man, The Indian Black Hawk* (Iowa City, 1938), uses the autobiography in great part.

A lot of material on the British period can be found in the State Historical Society of Wisconsin *Collections.* Such items as "Dickson and Grignon Papers," (11:271–315); Douglas Brymner, "The Capture of Fort McKay, Prairie du Chien, in 1814," (11:254–70); Augustin Grignon, "Seventy-two Years' Recollections of Wisconsin," (3:197–295); Alfred E. Bulgar, "Events at Prairie du Chien Previous to American Occupation, 1814," (13:2–9); "The Bulgar Papers," (13:10–154); and Alfred E. Bulgar, "Last Days of the British at Prairie du Chien," (13:154–62), contain a great deal of information valuable for the understanding of the British period in Wisconsin.

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS-URBANA
977.5W75CHR C001 V002
CHRONICLES OF WISCONSIN. MADISON
3 0112 025401891